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# Going Online! Use and Effectiveness of Online Mode of Instruction in the Teaching of English Language

### Amal Tom<sup>1</sup> and Nagendra Kumar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PhD candidate, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, IIT Roorkee, India. ORCID: 0000-0002-6072-0451 Email: amal\_t@hs.iitr.ac.in

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, IIT Roorkee, India. ORCID: 0000-0002-8292-7947. Email: nagendra.kumar@hs.iitr.ac.in

#### **Abstract**

Contemporary time necessitated the use of advanced, scientific and digital technologies to take forward the teaching-learning process uninterrupted, making teaching online effective, cheap, convenient, and an alternative to traditional classes. It has been a drastic change that revolutionised English Language classes. Unprecedented levels of digitalisation in the field of education cropped up many logistical and pedagogical problems. This research paper attempts to look into these problems through a survey, analysing the different perspectives and approaches of individual teachers in developing and evaluating language skills, developing primers and ICT tools, and using them for effective, pleasurable online language teaching-learning, making classes student-centred. It also analysed the scope of making online and traditional classrooms supplementary and complementary to each other. Certainly, there is a need for better infrastructure, training, connectivity, integration of Augmented and Virtual Reality to provide experiential learning and to cope up with emerging challenges

**Keywords:** Online classes, I.C.T. Tools, Evaluation, Syllabus, Teaching-Learning Process.

#### Introduction

The 21st century is considered the century of digitalisation, innovative technology, scientific temperament, and the explosion of ideas and knowledge. Scientific developments and technological advancements have provided us with smartphones and advanced supercomputers. From transportation to entertainment, developments in computer technology have permeated into all significant aspects of our lives. It is interesting to see how the growth of telecommunication has seeped into the classrooms, drastically changing the process of teaching and learning. Today, "Mobile Learning" through video conferences is changing students' lives all over the world. Furthermore, it is making learning more accessible, affordable, and attractive. Though Online Classes would have, in due course of time, become an inseparable part of the educational process, the immediate effects of the recent pandemic have led it to become a significant medium of education that cannot go unacknowledged.

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Though the idea of online classes is not new, we all know that its popularity increased exponentially only in the recent months with the worldwide lockdown that came upon us with the pandemic restrictions. The profusion of computer and mobile applications, especially in the two preceding decades of the pandemic, helped the world bring in radical changes in 'Online Teaching,' helping the teaching-learning process to continue uninterrupted even under direst situations. Before the advent of novel pandemic, we could not imagine that the teachers could use social media sites like WhatsApp and YouTube to engage classes. We also did not think it was feasible to take live classes over the internet, but applications like Microsoft Teams, Zoom App, WebEx, etc., ensured that the teachers could remain connected with their students even under very challenging conditions.

#### I.C.T. in E.L.T.

It is of great concern that in this age of digital classes, not much focus is given to the teaching of languages especially in English. The English language links us with the whole world. Training in the English language and developing various language skills ensure professional competency in an increasingly global workplace. As Kaushik and Kumar (2020) explain:

English makes it extremely convenient to communicate any official information or preparing business documents or passing information to a larger part of professional bodies... For any kind of education, economic activity, trade administration; beside the core knowledge of specific trade, an excellent command over written and spoken English is necessary. (p. 254)

Therefore, priority must be given to developing the four language skills, reading, writing, listening, and speaking, especially to handle English. Typically, teaching and developing these language skills involve a considerable amount of teacher-student interaction and classroom participation. But, when we move to a digital platform, the need for studentteacher interaction brings in a lot of logistical problems.

With the development of Information and Communication Technology (I.C.T.), online language teaching classes have improved by leaps and bounds. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (M.A.L.L.) and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (C.A.L.L.) have become the buzzwords of the 21st century. The I.C.T. tools have developed so much that now it is easy to hold synchronous classes with face-to-face interactions with the English Language Learners (E.L.L.s). Today, English Language learners have online resources like Memrise and Duolingo and workbooks that help them learn the language effectively. Video conferencing apps like Zoom App and WebEx ensure mitigating many of the problems for a seamless language teaching-learning process.

Though this integration of I.C.T. with E.L.T. came only in recent years, millions worldwide have now used it to develop their language competency. Dudeney and Hockly (2012) clearly outline how English Language Teaching has changed drastically through the development of the various tools and digital technology in the recent past,

The integration of technology in E.L.T. has undergone a dramatic shift in the past 25 years. Initially, it was limited to rudimentary word processing and gap-filling exercises, but mass access to the internet, the development of Web 2.0 tools and platforms, and the arrival of the social web and mobile technologies now enable teachers and learners to be globally-connected and globally educated. (p. 533)

The online teaching mode prides itself on the significant amount of accessibility that it offers to teachers and students. Moreover, unlike the teacher-centered learning process, as seen in usual classrooms, online classes shift the focus to the students allowing them to control the learning process, making them decide the speed at which they want to learn. And to this effect, many new materials are being developed each day, helping students master the necessary language skills. Dudeney and Hockly (2012) further point out how the development of various tools have transformed the English Language Classroom:

We have already seen an increase in the development of mobile-friendly apps for smartphones by publishers and by educational institutions such as the British Council. We also see increasing numbers of e-Course books and e-Work books, in which coursebook components can be downloaded on to learners' mobile devices or uploaded into a V.L.E., allowing for easier access outside the classroom. This, in theory, makes it easier for the English language teacher to introduce a blended component (part online, part face to face) to purely face-to-face teaching. This is a trend that we see increasing numbers of teachers following, and which is set to continue. (p. 540)

Even while we speak about the student-centered nature of the online classes, the consensus remains that it would be challenging to provide effective online classes without proper training to the teachers. As Samuel and Zaitun (2007) have argued,

Training in I.C.T. skills is crucial in implementing I.C.T. integration in the teaching and learning of English. As more teachers become competent using basic I.C.T. tools, there would be more I.C.T. integrated activities in the classroom. This would give a boost to English language teaching and learning. (pp.10).

## Methodology

For this research paper, a survey was conducted among school teachers teaching English in various parts of India. Under restrictions imposed by the recent pandemic and lockdown,

we could not do full justice to concerns like demography, gender, and age while selecting the respondents, and thus, had to stick to a random selection of the responders. Though we could not address the above concerns, the data we have received are consistent with the objectives of the survey, which was conducted to identify the effectiveness of teaching the English language and its related skills through the online mode of instruction. The survey included a set of fourteen "Likert style" questions based on five-level responses. While some of the survey questions were based on the effectiveness of acquisition of English language skills in the online mode of instruction, others were on the need for a suitable curriculum. The responses thus, received were carefully represented as graphs. The respondents were required to choose from among five responses viz. 'strongly agree,' 'agree,' 'neutral,' 'disagree,' and 'strongly disagree.' About 120 teachers participated in the survey, and each chose the most fitting option from among the options they were provided with.

#### **Survey Questions and Analysis**

The first statement in the survey, 'It is impossible to teach writing skills through online classes,' tried to identify whether teachers could develop writing skills using online mode of instruction. Interestingly, the respondents who opted for 'agree' and 'disagree' made up the same percentage (32.8%). Nearly 27% of the respondents chose to remain 'neutral' when around 6.7% 'strongly agreed' with the statement while just one person 'strongly disagreed.' These statistics show us that the English language teachers and educators are highly doubtful whether writing skills in English could be effectively developed using the online mode of instruction. However, looking at Fig.1, one can see a slight leaning towards the possibility of using online classes to teach writing skills, though teachers are apprehensive of using new and untested methods to teach students. Certainly, teachers require appropriate training to make them use newer techniques and feel confident to harness writing skills over the internet.



Fig.1

The second statement, 'Teaching textbooks online can help develop reading skills', was intended to derive the teachers' opinions on using textbooks to develop reading skills in online classes. Nearly 46.7% of the 120 responses 'agreed' with the given statement, while 30.8% remained 'neutral.' Nineteen respondents 'disagreed' and only 2.5% of the respondents decided to 'strongly disagree' and, the rest chose to 'strongly agree.' The data

and the Fig.2 provided below show the general feeling that it is feasible to use textbooks online to improve the reading skills of the pupils. In situations where asynchronous (recorded) classes are the only option, a teacher cannot intervene immediately to correct any mistake in pronunciation, accent, and intonation a student might commit. Even in synchronous (real-time) classes, the task becomes too tedious. It is easier to use textbooks as a useful teaching tool in a traditional classroom than in an online class. In a conventional classroom, a teacher can rectify the students' mistakes while engaging them in practice reading. Therefore, good video conferencing apps and faster internet connections are necessary to teach online to give a traditional classroom feel.

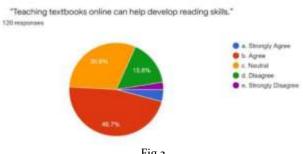
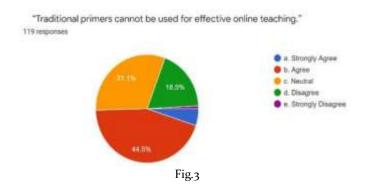


Fig.2

In the traditional classroom setup, primers are all important. Often, these primers become the first material that helps a student read. But, in the age of online classes, the traditional primers appear redundant. The feedback to the third statement, 'Traditional primers cannot be used for effective online teaching,' helps to understand the role of primers in online teaching. The question is whether traditional primers could be used for effective online teaching. Out of the 119 respondents, 44.5% of the total reacted with 'agree' to show that the traditional primers are not adequate in the online mode of instruction. Furthermore, 31.1% of the total decided to remain 'neutral' to the statement, and around 18% chose to 'disagree' with the statement, while 5% of the 119 respondents 'strongly agreed'. Only one respondent chose to 'strongly disagree.' Fig.3 clearly shows that the teachers understand that traditional primers do not serve all the purposes in an online class. In short, we could conclude, primers could still be there but requires modification to suit online teaching.

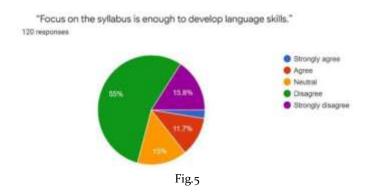


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The fourth statement, 'Grammar and spelling can be effectively taught online,' tried to identify if grammar and spelling could be effectively taught using the online mode of instruction. Of 120 responses received, 52 respondents (43.3%) decided to 'agree' with the statement. Nearly 24.2% of the respondents opted to 'disagree,' while 21.7% chose to remain 'neutral.' While 11 respondents chose 'strongly agree,' only two respondents, or 1.5% of the total, opted 'strongly disagree.' Fig.4 lets us understand that though it is possible to use an online mode of instruction to teach grammar and spelling, it is not as effective as a traditional class. The problem of student-teacher interactions and the teachers' inability to provide their insights also make it challenging to teach grammar and spelling using online classes.



The next statement in the survey, 'Focus on the syllabus is enough to develop language skills,' analyses whether just covering the syllabus is enough to develop language skills. This analysis is essential as in Indian schools, with the onset of the online mode of instruction, there has been a strong focus on mere completing of the syllabus. Often, the emphasis on the syllabus takes away the precedence of providing training in critical language skills. The outdated syllabi offer nothing of substance to the English Language Learners (E.L.L.s). Of the 120 responses, 55% or nearly 66 respondents chose to 'disagree' with the statement. Simultaneously, 15.8% of the respondents chose to 'strongly disagree', while 15% chose to remain 'neutral'. Only 11.7% of the respondents decided to 'agree', and the rest (2.5%) decided to 'strongly agree'. The data and Fig.5 given under could be analysed to understand that the respondents do not believe that the syllabus could help develop English language skills. Instead, a hybrid approach of using syllabi and various language development tools could effectively build language skills in English.



Teaching online has brought in several challenges. One of the challenges that worry English language teachers is the difficulty they face to have an accurate, objective evaluation of the speaking skill using the available modes of evaluation and technology. This difficulty is further aggravated when faced with shoddy network connectivity.

The sixth statement, 'Conversing with my students online/on-call is enough to evaluate their speaking skills,' explored if conversing with students online or on-call, was enough to evaluate their speaking skills. Of the 120 respondents, 38.3% selected 'disagree' while about 32.5% 'agreed.' Twenty-seven answerers preferred to remain 'neutral' over 4.2% who stood with 'strongly disagree.' The rest of the participants of the survey 'strongly agreed' to the statement. As the number of teachers who agree to the statement almost equals the number of teachers who disagree, we must conclude there remains a significant disagreement among teachers in keeping conversing as the sole method of evaluation of speaking skill.

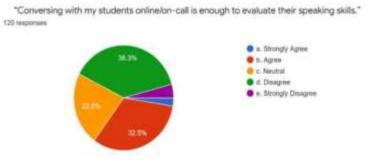
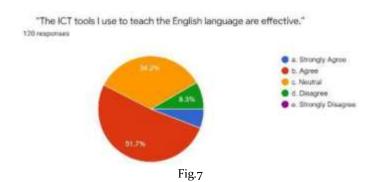


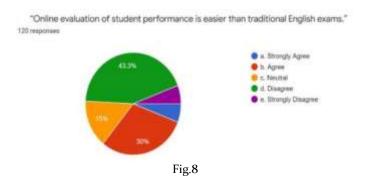
Fig.6

The next statement, 'The I.C.T. tools I use to teach English language are effective', tried to analyse the user satisfaction with the I.C.T. tools available and are being used to deliver fruitful online classes. One hundred twenty repliers replied to the statement. Almost 51.7% of the total selected 'agree' stating the I.C.T. tools available are effective and fruitful to engage children online. The graphical representation (Fig.7) clearly shows the differences of opinion, the majority showing full satisfaction with the available I.C.T. tools. However, we know there is a need for advanced applications and software to provide better training to English Language Learners.

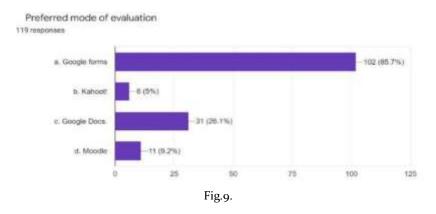


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The survey also wanted to know the comparative feasibility of online evaluation over the traditional mode. Thus, the statement, 'Online evaluation of student performance is easier than traditional English exams,' sought to seek the reactions of the surveyed as to what they felt about the ease of online modes against traditional examination methods. Nearly 43.3% opted for 'disagree,' 30% 'agree', and about 15% or 18 of the total decided to remain 'neutral,' and just seven respondents each chose 'strongly disagree' and 'strongly agree.' It is true that the online mode of assessment is rigid, and the connectivity issues that occur in the various parts of India leave teachers helpless to assess the nuances of language usage of students.

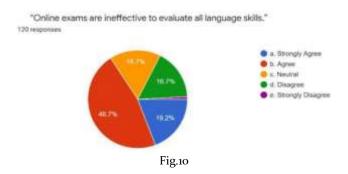


The above-analysed statement inevitably leads to the ninth question/statement of the survey. The question tries to know from the teachers whether they think the examinations held online could test all the required English language skills. The graph (Fig. 9) on the preferred mode of evaluation shows, the most commonly used app is Google forms to conduct examinations.

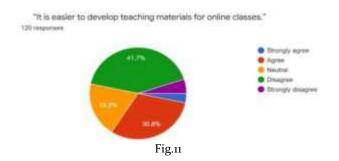


Only certain types of questions can be asked while using google forms, which might become redundant when used to evaluate the written and comprehensive language skills of pupils. Therefore, the survey in the statement, 'Online exams are ineffective to evaluate all language skills,' sought the response of the teachers to know if they believed that the online mode of examination was ineffective in assessing all the English language skills. It was seen that 46.7% of the total 120 respondents opted 'agree', affirming that online exams were inadequate to evaluate all language skills, while 19.2% chose to 'strongly agree' with the statement. This data shows the distrust the teachers have in the use of such online

modes of examination. The belief remains that such methods are inflexible and inadequate to assess and evaluate the language skills, which are usually quickly assessed using traditional evaluation methods.

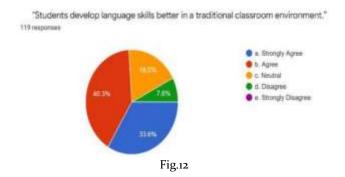


The tenth statement, 'It is easier to develop teaching materials for online classes,' tried to deduce the problems faced in developing teaching materials for online classes. It is interesting to note that 41.7% decided to 'disagree' and 5% to 'strongly disagree', bringing the total opponents to 46.7%, which would mean a considerable percentage of the teachers believe that it is not easy to develop instructional materials and tools for online classes. The data collected and presented below in Fig.11 shows the teachers find it challenging to engage classes online. These challenges also arise due to the difficulty and tediousness one experiences navigating through the various I.C.T. tools. It means extra effort is required to make the online classes exciting. Teaching materials developed exclusively for online teaching alone can be used for developing language skills in online teaching. Online modes of instruction are here to stay. Without further, systematic and suitable development of study materials, it will be difficult for teachers to engage English Language Learners and develop their language skills.

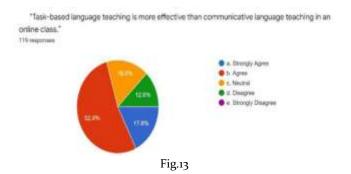


Out of the 119 respondents, 40.3% 'agree' and 33.6% 'strongly agree' with the statement 'Students develop language skills better in a traditional classroom environment.' It would mean these teachers do not believe online classes as an alternative or a substitute for traditional classroom teaching. Traditional classrooms are better to create real-life situations to develop language skills easier. It is almost consensual that the teachinglearning process becomes more straightforward in a classroom. Further, with the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students, it is easier to develop language skills under constant observation. To be conclusive, we now understand that cooperative

language learning and communicative language learning processes in a traditional classroom help students build language skills better.



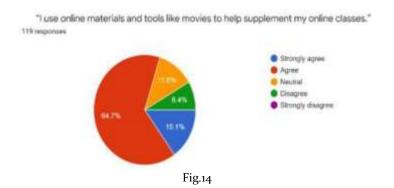
Task-based Language Teaching (T.B.L.T.) and Communicative Language Teaching (C.L.T.) have their own strengths and weaknesses. In this context, it is important to know what the teachers, the real taskmasters, feel about these two methods of teaching English online. Therefore, the statement 'Task-based language teaching is more effective than communicative language teaching in an online-class', was given to know the general feel of the teachers. Among 119 teachers, 70.5% preferred task-based teaching over communicative language teaching by choosing either 'agree' or 'strongly agree', and just 16.8% of the respondents remained 'neutral' while 12.6% 'disagreed'. That is to say, in the absence of possible classroom communication, task-based language learning technique is a definitive way of training and developing the students' language skills in English.



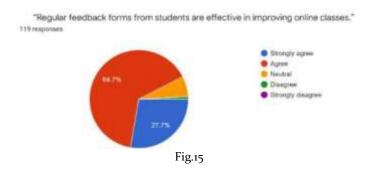
Often, online language classes tend to become monotonous and ineffective. Therefore, teachers must find materials like videos and movies to augment their classes to engage children effectively online. Thus, the thirteenth statement, 'I use online materials and tools like movies to help supplement my online classes', sought to know whether they felt it necessary to use such materials to create interest in pupils to attend classes online. Of the 119 responses received, a considerable number of the respondents i.e., almost 64.7% selected 'agree' and around 15.1% selected 'strongly agree' to the statement, and only 11.3% of the respondents chose to remain 'neutral'. The rest of the respondents chose to disagree. Chris Pim(2013) suggests,

Technology continues to be used for all sorts of specific language learning activities, such as oral practice and reading and writing skills development.

However, I.C.T. seem to be particularly successful when integrated into project-based language learning where English can be acquired naturally through themed activities. (p.17)



Under the normal traditional classroom environment, the students' behavior and actions work as appropriate feedback tools to the teachers. It also shows how effective the teacher's class was. The immediate feedback mechanism, at times, does not work or maybe weak and vague in online mode, especially for those teachers who engage in asynchronous (recorded) classes. Therefore, the idea of feedback forms for students to register their grievances and problems is often used. Thus, the final statement, 'Regular feedback forms from students are effective in improving online classes', tries to realise if such feedback forms from the students could help teachers develop and improve their classes. Around 119 respondents responded to the question and a vast majority (92.4%) chose 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to state feedback forms help teachers improve their classes. About 6.6% opted to remain 'neutral' and only one respondent chose to 'disagree' with the statement.



#### Results

Scientific and technological advancements coupled with radical changes in information technology have ushered in an era of revolution in Education propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic that necessitated online innovative pedagogical methods bringing in thorough changes in the way English is taught in schools and colleges. Today, new technologies are reimagining teacher-student relationships and are making classes more interactive and engaging. During contemporary times, online classes are being held worldwide, making sure the educational process continues uninterrupted despite social distancing, providing proper training and developing required competency in students.

The survey, which was held among 120 English teachers, tried to look into the problems and challenges of online classes imbibed into the educational mechanism at such an unprecedented level due to the pandemic. As the above study shows, teachers were intended to provide their opinion on the various aspects of online teaching and suggest solutions to the problems faced because of the shift towards the new order. It was seen, though with inhibitions, with proper training and tools, the teachers would be able to provide effective classes to the students online.

Teachers now believe that it is time to move away from the traditional use of textbooks and primers and develop online study materials to augment English language classes. This change in focus also calls for drastic changes in the examination system and the assessment of the various language skills. Moreover, teachers have understood the versatility of the online classes, and a majority do plan to use them- not to replace all traditional classes but to use them as supplementary and complementary to the conventional classes. This move to the online mode of learning would help provide practical and accessible language classes to English Language Learners worldwide.

#### **Conclusion**

There is a general agreement that online classes are here to stay. Therefore, with all the available technology and tools, it becomes the duty of teachers, educationalists and the various educational boards and concerned government agencies to develop materials suitable for online teaching. Furthermore, governmental agencies should make e-learning and m-learning tools accessible and affordable to all. Teachers must take upon themselves the responsibility of acquainting themselves with the nuances of the I.C.T. tools and use various multimedia content and materials to make their classes pleasurable and effective. As Nicky Hockly (2011) states in her article, "Digital Literacies,"

It is increasingly difficult for us to separate language from the digital environment in which it is being used. As such, one could argue that by integrating new technologies into our classroom, we can also help learners develop key digital literacies and that it is indeed our duty as language teachers to do so. (p. 110)

The survey points at the obligation of schools and colleges in parallelly providing digital facilities, including virtual classes reinforced by Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality, which could help students develop their language skills through experiential learning. The survey also stresses the need to help students master English language skills at their own pace. This need for a student-centered model of education is emphasised when Nenagh Kemp and Rachel Grieve (2014) say, 'in contrast to the faster, real-time pace of face-to-face classes, the extra time available for online activities might allow students to think about course material more critically and reflectively, leading to deeper understanding of the

course content' (p. 2). This flexibility in learning could help the students gain a better understanding of the language.

The survey shows that the educational institutions and teachers currently engaged in teaching English must understand that the future of teaching is here. Therefore, the focus of the institutions and teachers must be to move from the limitations of traditional education but have an integrated approach where online and offline methods can be seamlessly blended, amalgamated, and made complimentary. Thus, it is needed that the institutions must improve facilities, amenities and even infrastructure to fit to the current situation and provide training to teachers to equip themselves with I.C.T. skills. This training in I.C.T. tools would allow the educational institutions and teachers to take forward both online and offline methods of instructions, keeping them complementary to each other. Furthermore, the authorities must take up research to develop materials that could help teach English multi-modal and multi-dimensional. That would help make English language teaching classes engaging, accessible and affordable to all.

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#### **Appendix**

# Survey on the Feasibility of Using Online Classes to Teach the English Language Likert type questions:

- 1. "It is impossible to teach writing skills through online classes."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
- 2. "Teaching textbooks online can help develop reading skills."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
- 3. "Traditional primers cannot be used for effective online teaching."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
- 4. "Grammar and spelling can be effectively taught online."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
- 5. "Focus on the syllabus is enough to develop language skills."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
- 6. "Conversing with my students online/ on-call is enough to evaluate their speaking skills."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
- 7. "The I.C.T. tools I use to teach the English Language are effective."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
- 8. "Online evaluation of student performance is easier than traditional English exams."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
- 9. "Online exams are ineffective to evaluate all language skills."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
- 10. "It is easier to develop teaching materials for online classes."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
- 11. "Students develop language skills better in a traditional classroom environment."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
- 12. "Task-based language teaching is more effective than communicative language teaching in an online class."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
- 13. "I use online materials and tools like movies to help supplement my online classes."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
- 14. "Regular feedback forms from students are effective in improving online classes."
- a. Strongly Agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree